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U.S. Not Yet Allowed to Question Israelis

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WASHINGTON—The Justice Department, continuing to pursue evidence of Israeli espionage in the United States, is awaiting Israel's response to requests to interview Israelis linked to the case of confessed spy Jonathan Jay Pollard, a government official said Tuesday.

"The requests were made in late June during Washington talks involving Justice officials, Israeli legal representatives and an attorney for Israeli Air Force Gen. Aviem (Avi) Sella, Pollard's reputed spymaster.

Sella is one of several Israelis who were publicly implicated in the spy ring for the first time when Pollard, a civilian intelligence analyst with the Navy, pleaded guilty last month to espionage-related charges. Government sources contend that Israel concealed their involvement from U.S. investigators who visited Israel last December to interview people linked to Pollard's espionage activities.

A government official who requested anonymity said Tuesday that federal investigators continue

to believe that other Americans, as well as Israelis, have joined in still-unreported intelligence activities in the United States. Their suspicions are based in part on information volunteered by Pollard during plea-bargain negotiations this spring and during later questioning, the official said.

In a related development, Manhattan investment adviser Steven E. Stern said Tuesday that he arranged the first meeting between Sella and Pollard after meeting Sella through "sheer coincidence." Stern's lawyer, Jonathan L. Rosner, said his client met Sella at an Israel bonds fund-raising event held by Stern in New York.

However, Stern was unaware that his introduction was the key to an espionage ring, Stern and Rosner said, adding that the financial consultant is not under federal investigation. A federal source agreed Tuesday, saying that Stern has cooperated in the Pollard investigation and is not suspected of criminal involvement.

The New York Times has identified Stern as the "New York associate," anonymously cited in Pollard's plea-bargain agreement last month, who introduced Pollard to his future spymaster in the spring of 1984.

Childhood Friends

In a brief interview, Stern said he had known the 36-year-old Pollard for "decades" but indicated that his acquaintance with Sella was only passing. Stern's lawyer said his client and Pollard were childhood friends whose parents knew each other well and that the two men have maintained a "sporadic" friendship.

According to plea-bargain documents filed in U.S. District Court in Washington, Pollard's New York associate indicated that, in the spring of 1984, "the associate had recently met a high-level officer in the Israeli air force. Mr. Pollard asked to be put in contact with the Israeli officer," and the associate—Stern—arranged the meeting at Pollard's request.

Stern's lawyer said Tuesday that

it is his recollection that his client and Pollard did not meet face to face or even talk by telephone during the critical exchanges named in the documents, but he did not say how the two men communicated.

Appeared Before Grand Jury

He added that Stern appeared at least once before a federal grand jury in Washington that investigated the Pollard affair but refused to discuss his testimony. Stern refused to comment further.

Meanwhile, in another development Tuesday involving alleged Israeli espionage, federal officials confirmed that the Justice Department and U.S. Customs Service are investigating charges that Israel obtained and smuggled to Israel U.S. technology to build cluster bombs, weapons that the United States had refused to supply after reports that the Israelis had misused them in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Sources close to the inquiry, speaking only on the condition that they not be identified, said the federal agencies are investigating private contractors in the United States, reportedly in Iowa and Pennsylvania. This investigation, however, is not related to the Pollard case, the officials said.